

Developing a Transformational Leadership Model to Effectively Include Persons with Disabilities in the Workplace

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Abstract

The South African government has enacted various employment laws intended to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace. The legislation and policies are not, however, always effectively implemented, resulting in the exclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace. Within this context, a multidisciplinary study incorporating leadership and the law is conducted to address the rationale behind the non-compliance with disability legislation. In addition, this study examines the role of transformational leadership and its contribution towards effective implementation of disability provisions. This study was conducted in a local government sector of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Data was collected through interviews with senior leaders responsible for implementing disability laws and to develop strategies to include persons with disabilities in the workplace. Employees with disabilities were also interviewed. A thematic analysis was utilised to discuss the data that arose from the interviews. Various themes have been created as a result thereof. This study finds that transformational leadership is an important approach to adopt in order to include and promote the participation of persons with disabilities in the workplace. The study therefore contributes to the development of a transformational leadership model to include persons with disabilities in the workplace.

Keywords: Transformational leadership; persons; disabilities; workplace

Introduction

Persons with disabilities have suffered and continue to suffer inequalities in the workplace. According to Van Niekerk and Van der Merwe (2013: 1) they are a disadvantaged group in society with limited prospects of employment. Various employment laws and disability provisions require workplace leaders to transform workplaces and guarantee the inclusion of persons with disabilities. In order to achieve this transformation, however, the implementation of legislation is crucial. It requires a particular kind of workplace leadership, such as transformational leadership, in order to be effectively implemented. Gathiram (2008: 151) asserts that the failure to implement legislation affects the intent to protect persons with disabilities. Warrick (2017: 55) describes transformational leadership as a process in which leaders accomplish noteworthy positive changes in individuals, groups and organisations by using inspiration, vision and skills to encourage people to go beyond their self-centredness in order to achieve a greater *purpose*. Transformational leadership is also explored in other management contexts in order to promote diversity. It appears, however, that this has not yet been explored within the disability perspective.

In this context, Sayyadi *et al.* (2015: 464) support the view that transformational leaders are receptive to employees' needs. They further affirm that transformational leaders institute radical changes for organisations through changing the mind-sets and beliefs of

individuals and creating inclusivity within organisations (Sayyadi *et al.* 2015: 464). Carter *et al.* (2014: 48) explain that transformational leaders offer individualised consideration through modified support to employees. Transformational leadership appears to be expedient in order to accomplish inclusion, equity and execution of disability legislation in the workplace. Against this background, a multidisciplinary study incorporating leadership (management studies) and the law is conducted in order to analyse the role of transformational leadership and its contribution towards the effective implementation of workplace disability provisions.

This study explores the role and impact of transformational leadership on the implementation of disability laws in the Municipality. The study further aims to address the rationale behind the non-compliance with disability related provisions. The study assesses the senior leadership's level of awareness in the role they play as transformational leaders towards accommodating persons with disabilities within the Municipality, identifies the critical factors affecting the implementation of disability related legislation within the Municipality, assesses the impact of transformational leadership on the implementation of the legislation relating to disability within the Municipality and recommends a leadership transformational model or framework that accommodates persons with disabilities within the Municipality specifically studied, the selected local government sector in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. While the local government leaders possibly understand the 'transformational' approach to disability, they do not use it when dealing with disability affairs. It is within this context that this study develops a transformational leadership model to practically equip workplace leaders to include persons with disabilities in the workplace.

Overview of Transformational Leadership

Achua and Lussier (2013: 311) contend that transformational leadership was initially expressed by James Burns in 1978 before Bernard Bass expanded thereon. According to Achua and Lussier (2013: 314) such leaders challenge the existing state of affairs and advance a persuasive case for change. They stimulate a common vision for the future, provide operational leadership during the transition and institutionalise the transformation (Achua and Lussier 2013: 314). Achua and Lussier (2013: 320) further explain that transformational leadership is composed of four behavior dimensions, namely "idealised influence, inspirational motivation, individual consideration and intellectual stimulation".

According to Achua and Lussier (2013: 320) "idealised influence" relates to a transformational leadership ability to "develop great symbolic power" that is utilised to influence employees in the workplace. Inspirational motivation, as per Achua and Lussier (2013: 320), relates to how a transformational leader fervently expresses "a future idealistic goal or situation that is a better alternative to the status quo". Achua and Lussier (2013: 320) continue to explain that intellectual stimulation relates to a creative transformational leader who encourages employees to find new ways to deal with existing workplace challenges. Lastly, van Aswegen and Engelbrecht (2009: 221) clarify that "individualised consideration is reflected when a leader pays special attention to each individual's needs for realisation or fulfilment of his or her talent and potential, growth and performance by acting as a coach or mentor". Carter *et al.* (2014: 48) elucidate that transformational leaders offer individualised consideration through modified support to employees. According to Achua and Lussier (2013: 323) they additionally use tactical methods to deal with workplace issues.

Van Aswegen and Engelbrecht (2009: 221) illustrate that the interests of transformational leaders are, among others, to achieve autonomy, fairness and parity. Van Aswegen and Engelbrecht (2009: 221) further argue that challenging the status quo becomes a regular occurrence for the transformational leader. The leadership style impacts on how the organisation is run and ultimately the organisation's performance. If leaders in the local government sector adopt a transformational leadership style, the issues of inequality and

disability discrimination can ultimately be addressed. The implementation of disability legislation requires leaders who can pay attention to the needs of disabled persons and accept individual differences. Sahgal and Pathak (2007: 265) indicate that by their behavior, transformational leaders acknowledge that people are different. Consequently, they should be employed based on individual capabilities and differences. Krensbock and Boehm (2016: 1581) state that the role of transformational leadership in supporting employees with all kinds of physical or psychological disabilities has been explored.

While research has been conducted on the role of transformational leadership in supporting employees with disabilities in the workplace, it appears that currently there is no comprehensive study on the role of transformational leadership in the implementation of the legislation governing disability in the workplace. This study addresses this gap. For the successful implementation of disability laws in the workplace, caring and supportive leaders are necessary. Transformational leaders hold a particular set of behaviours. Sadeghi and Pihie (2012: 187) find transformational leaders to “be models of integrity and fairness, set clear goals, have high expectations, provide support and recognition, stir the emotions and passions of people and get people to look beyond their self-interest to reach for the improbable”. Furthermore, transformational leaders closely connect with employees. It requires the inclusion of employees in transformation plans, processes and strategies. It also involves the diagnosis of the employees’ needs and capabilities in a non-judgmental way and intent listening.

The abovementioned literature underscores the importance of transformational leadership for the attainment of parity, and the promotion and safeguarding of individual rights in the workplace. It further emphasises the role of transformational leadership towards the attainment of disability equity, fairness and diversity in the workplace. The study argues that transformational leadership forms the cornerstone of organisational change and transformation. Since transformational leaders challenge the status quo, and promote justice, fairness and inclusivity, an effective implementation of disability legislation in the local government sector may be achieved. The Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 and the Employment Equity Act: Code of Good Practice on Employment of Persons with Disabilities (2015) requires reasonable accommodation and the development of practical measures in order to accommodate and include persons with disabilities in the workplace. As observed from the above literature, transformational leadership possesses the necessary attributes to achieve disability inclusion and equity in the workplace.

Methodology

This research employed a qualitative approach. Whittaker (2002: 251) explains that the rationale behind choosing the qualitative research method is that it is relevant if the study investigates, *inter alia*, human conduct and functioning of the workplace. From a legal perspective, Argyrou (2017: 98) asserts that qualitative empirical legal research explores the social and factual circumstances, such as the public’s view and comprehension of law and fairness. In-depth interviews were conducted in order to ascertain the senior leadership’s level of awareness on the role they play as transformational leaders in including persons with disabilities in the workplace. Additionally, employees with disabilities were engaged in order to validate the information gathered from the leaders. Ethical clearance was granted prior to the interviews.

Purposive sampling was found useful in this study, particularly on the identification of the relevant senior leaders. In this regard, twelve (12) leaders were selected based on their decision-making powers influencing the day-to-day operations in their respective departments. Additionally, they are required to ensure transformation and compliance with the law which promotes disability inclusion in the workplace. Moreover, they are expected to promote and protect human rights and develop and drive an inclusive workplace culture through change

management programmes. Some of the leaders selected were involved in the formulation of strategy for inclusion of persons with disabilities. Acharya *et al.* (2013: 330) contend that purposive sampling is a method mainly utilised in qualitative research since the participants chosen are the right target to achieve the research objective. Supporting this view, Etikan, Musa and Alkassim (2016: 2) contend that the participants selected to participate in the study must be competent, knowledgeable and have an interest in the subject. It is for these reasons that purposive sampling was utilised to identify the leaders who participated in this study.

Due to the nature and sensitivity of the research, it was important to select employees with disabilities based on their availability and willingness to partake in this study. It was important to protect the rights of employees with disabilities and to safeguard them against prejudice as a result of the interviews. Thus, the convenience sampling technique was used to identify five persons with disabilities working in the same local government institution as the leaders chosen to participate in the study. Furthermore, as Struwing and Stead (2013: 116) explain, convenience sampling is helpful since the participants are selected according to their accessibility and willingness to participate in the interviews. In-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted and recorded to ensure accuracy of the data. The responses that emanated from the interviews were then captured through data coding and the themes physically developed from the data through markers or highlighters. A thematic analysis was then conducted to discuss the collected data. The interview data was transcribed and thoroughly examined to gather precise data and identify common themes. To maintain confidentiality, the details of the participants are not disclosed in this study. To identify the participants, leaders are coded, for example, as “Leader 1” (L1) while employees are coded as “Employee 1” (E1). The main findings that emerged from the interviews are explored below.

Results and Discussion

This section presents a discussion on the senior leaderships’ level of awareness on disability, as well as the impact of transformational leadership on the implementation of disability provisions within the Municipality. Stemming from the discussion, a recommendation is made focusing on the leadership transformational model or framework that accommodates persons with disabilities within the Municipality.

Awareness and Understanding of Disability by the Municipal Leaders

The interviews indicate that there is no consistent understanding of the term ‘persons with disabilities’ by the leaders. While some leaders are able to identify certain elements of the legal definition, others are unable to do so. Instead, the leaders gave various definitions and were not consistent in their responses. In this context, L12 states that: “I think there is a legal definition because there are prescripts that deal with this, but it is obviously people who are born with, or who in the course of their lives get afflicted with, illnesses or injuries which result in them not being able to be as functional as people who are abled, without the environment being responsive to their particular challenges”. L1 said that persons with disabilities are “people who are abled differently”. L5 describes “[P]ersons with disabilities as people that have challenges, both physical and mental, and when I say mental I mean psychological, that I can’t say abnormal but I can say challenged, they are not like able bodied, able minded – so they are people with disabilities”.

The lack of understanding of disability by the leaders is also commented on by the employees with disabilities who participated in this study. In particular, the identified shortcoming in the leaders’ comprehension of “substantial limitation” is expressed by E5 who states that, while the leaders generally understand disability, “when it comes to making environment suitable for disabled people, I can say the process is too slow”. When asked whether workplace leaders understand disability, E4 responds: “[N]o, no I actually think that management should I don’t know, can you workshop them to make them more aware?” E1 remarks the following with regard to the management’s understanding of disability: “[I]t depends on individual managers,

some do, some don't seem to embrace people with disabilities". The lack of understanding of disabilities is a major impediment to transformation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace. This study indicates that while leaders acknowledge the need to accommodate persons with disabilities, they do not completely understand all the elements of disability as provided for in the legislation, thus hindering the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Additionally, the study finds that the leaders have unfounded assumptions of persons with disabilities. Their responses regarding their understanding of disability is deeply troubling - their focus is on impairment and not on the ability or competence of persons with disabilities. For example, L2 states "this is a group of people who because of their disabilities cannot be in a position to perform the jobs that are normally performed by abled persons". L3 describes a person with disabilities as "a person who is incapacitated etc. in relation to work that they are supposed to be doing" (emphasis added). Another example is L10 who remarks that persons with disabilities "will prohibit them or perceived as prohibiting them from undertaking work duties" (emphasis added). The employees who participated in the study also confirmed that, operationally, employees with disabilities are stigmatised and not afforded the opportunities given to non-disabled persons. In this regard E4 notes that "my view again is that PWD's are perceived time wasters".

A leadership model that is influential in dealing with stigma attached to persons with disabilities is required. It is argued that transformational leaders are focused on change (Von Treuer *et al.* 2018: 2). Additionally, transformational leadership is identified as a system of transforming and changing people's behaviour (Malik, Javed and Hassan 2017: 147). Thus, transformational leadership revolves around the premise that leaders can influence employees' beliefs and their conduct by appealing to the importance of workplace outcomes (Moynihan, Panday and Wright 2011: 5). It follows that transformational leadership may be utilised to deal with unfounded assumptions and stigma attached to persons with disabilities in the workplace.

Emanating from the discussion and responses of the leaders, it is clear that the medical model understanding of disability that focuses on the impairment rather than the capability of persons with disabilities continues to exist in the workplace. It is apparent that persons with disabilities are viewed as people who are incapable of doing their work due to their condition. The assessment of persons with disabilities by leaders is therefore based on the medical approach. This approach may prejudice the right of persons with disabilities to equal opportunities in the workplace. Workplace leaders must therefore change from a focus on impairment to considering the capabilities of persons with disabilities, thereby safeguarding their human right to equality. In addition, they should adopt a transformational leadership model as transformational leaders are found to have "the ability to assess, diagnose and evaluate employees' individual needs rather than treating employees as a group" (Louw *et al.* 2017: 3). This approach is found to protect and recognise the employee's needs in order to ensure that employees are equipped with the necessary skills to tackle complicated circumstances (Louw *et al.* 2017: 3).

Individualised treatment is what the notion of "reasonable accommodation" requires, not the treatment of persons with disabilities as a similar group. As stated by Hildenbrand and Sacramento (2018: 33), "among the dimensions of transformational leadership is an individualised consideration which signifies the attention leaders pay to employees' needs and concerns in the workplace". Transformational leadership may be influential in adopting an approach that considers persons with disabilities on their capabilities and performance and not from a medical perspective. In so doing, the transformational leader does not only consider the abilities of persons with disabilities but also ensures that they have the necessary individualised tools to perform their jobs, including the provision of reasonable accommodation where needed.

Factors Affecting the Implementation of Disability Provisions

While there is a level of understanding from the leaders in this study of the need to accommodate persons with disabilities, it appears that they are not ready to accommodate them. Most of the leaders raised the concern that the implementation of disability laws remains complicated. L1 states “stereotypes, socialisation... willingness not there”. L2 identifies “mindset shift, less will especially from executive [also shared by L8] and poor strategy formulation” as hindrances to the implementation of disability related provisions. Disability is not a priority issue, instead “service delivery is what drives... Municipality” according to L3. In addition, “cultural and social barriers” is identified by L3 as hindrances to effective implementation of disability policies. L7 states that “political interference that is being received from our leadership impede the process of implementation”. While L7, L9 and L12 raise the issue of budget constraints.

This study finds that the Municipality does not have a comprehensive policy designed to address disability issues. The Municipality relies only on its Employment Equity Plan as the strategic tool to address disability matters. This is a huge restraint on the effective implementation of disability laws. This is confirmed by most of the leaders, including L12, who notes that: “[T]he third thing it might be around the extent to which there is a comprehensive policy in place, because I am not aware other than some of the prescripts that come nationally and provincially, and the Employment Equity Plan. [...] I’m not sure that we actually have got a policy document on that”. Adding that, “generally for things to be successful you need to have the policy which creates an enabling environment”. E1 states that: “I haven’t seen policy that addresses disability, the only thing that I have seen that addresses persons with disabilities is the Employment Equity Plan, so really I don’t know whether they have a policy or not, we need policy that will address issues that are faced by persons with disabilities”. E5 says that “except the Employment Equity I know about, I don’t know any specific policy”.

Consequently, it is established that disability is not a priority issue for these leaders and disability inclusion is merely done as a ‘tick box exercise’ to meet legislative requirements. In this context, E3 says that “they want people with disabilities so that they will meet the targets in numbers, they want to have those targets but with regard to the main focus point of having people with disabilities in terms of accommodation and awareness, they don’t focus on those kind of things”. While L7 mentions that “the other issue that we are experiencing, I call it window dressing, we somehow employ a quota system when we are dealing with the issue of transformation. We do not drill down into the issues how it should be implemented but what we are chasing are numbers”. L11 observes that, when it comes to persons with disabilities, workplaces “look at targets”, asking “are we serious or we just there to meet the target?”

This concern raises the question whether leaders are ready to accommodate persons with disabilities in the workplace or not. For example, L2 notes that they are “relatively ready” adding that “I would not expect that an organisation like [...] having been around since [...] would be struggling just to reach 2% of people with disabilities”. L7 says: “[W]ell, to a certain extent, yes”. Thus, for transformational change to materialise, there is a need for a committed and influential leadership to drive transformation in the workplace. Transformational leadership has been described as influential organisational change which encompasses the development and execution of the organisational vision (Singh 2003: 33). Transformational leaders question assumptions, reframe challenges and approach the general state of things in a different way (Van Aswegen and Engelbrecht 2009: 2). They not only challenge the status quo but also create platforms to explore new ways of doing things and create new opportunities to learn (Carmichael, Collins, Emsell and Haydon 2011: 126). The responses of the participants suggested that there is a need for transformational leadership in order to change the existing state from one that does not accommodate persons with disabilities to one that includes and accommodates them.

A transformational leader is identified as a 'visionary leader' by the participants in the study. While the focus of the study is not on visionary leadership, it is apparent that there is a strong connection between a visionary leader and a transformational leader. In this context, L2 states that a "transformational leader is visionary for starters, is one of the ingredients of a visionary leader". L4 notes that as a transformational leader "you have to have a vision that we as followers need to abide by". Thus, transformational leaders respond to workplace challenges with a vision of changing the environment to a better future state. Within the disability context, a transformational leader's vision is to guarantee a future workplace that promotes and protects human rights, including those of persons with disabilities.

Mthethwa (2011: 110) asserts that "transformational leaders are visionary leaders of potentially historical significance who react to a crisis with great vision and great ideas, and possess a willingness to foster grand experiments in solving great problems of the day". Givens (2008: 9) argues that transformational leaders give special importance or value to new prospects and promote a compelling vision of the future. It can be said, therefore, that by being visionary, a transformational leader is guided by the concept of a future state of the organisation that caters for every employee in the workplace. This characteristic is found to be pertinent to this study as the ultimate goal is to observe persons with disabilities being accommodated and included in the workplace through the effective implementation of disability laws.

Transformational Leadership and the Implementation of Disability Provisions in the Workplace

It is the argument of this study that transformational leaders are change agents. This is a critical element pertinent to the study as there is a need for leaders to advocate for change in the workplace and guarantee the inclusion and promotion of human rights for persons with disabilities. For instance, L2 notes that "if you are a transformational leader, you should be an agent of change". L8 is of the view that a transformational leader is someone who "embraces change". L3 says "with transformational change you need transformational leadership and unless that exists then change will never happen". The successful execution of disability laws and inclusion of persons with disabilities requires leaders who are committed to transform the workplace by focusing on critical developmental issues affecting persons with disabilities. Shanker and Bin Sayeed (2012: 470) describe transformational leaders as change agents who tend to nurture the idea of receptivity to the organisational transformation process. Accordingly, in order to manage and lead change in relation to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace, transformational leadership is essential to initiate and drive the change management process.

It is interesting that change management dominates most responses from the leaders regarding the effective implementation of disability laws in the workplace. In this regard, L2's view is that "if you want to be successful in implementing any changes within the environment for accessibility and acceptance of people with disabilities, you need to have a change management action plan in place". L5 says that what is needed is "development programs, diversity interventions – anything to do with change management". In addition, L11 observes that there is a need for "change management for senior management and for the staff to accept individuals, people with disabilities in the workplace".

Deschamps (2016: 196) asserts that transformational leadership is associated with successful organisational change and the promotion of an environment imbued with organisational justice. Accordingly, this study recommends an effective change management framework (explored below) that is designed to ensure commitment by executive leaders to prioritise and include persons with disabilities in the workplace by executing disability laws. Among the key findings of the study is the positive role that transformational leadership may play in the implementation of workplace disability laws. This study finds that workplace leaders

are not utilising transformational leadership principles despite understanding that they should be transformational in performing their duties. Consequently, there is a need to develop a transformational leadership approach in the workplace. The following is the recommended model for developing transformational leadership to implement disability initiatives in the workplace.

Recommended Model for the Development and Implementation of Transformational Leadership in the Workplace

Figure 1 focuses on the development and implementation of transformational leadership in the workplace. Before leaders can adopt any strategy or policy and be committed to the inclusion of persons with disabilities, they must adopt a transformational leadership approach. Additionally, the environment must be ready and conducive to include persons with disabilities. Although leaders have some understanding of what transformational leadership is and its importance to disability inclusion, they are not necessarily in practice applying the principles of transformational leadership to disability inclusion. Disability issues are not a priority and there are not enough resources to reasonably accommodate persons with disabilities. As this study demonstrates, transformational leaders are influential and challenge the status quo. It is these particular qualities that enable leaders to challenge the status quo and bring about change. It is contended that leaders require the aforementioned qualities in order to drive disability initiatives and effectively implement legislation governing disability in the workplace.



Figure 1: Developing transformational leadership practically to implement disability initiatives in the workplace.

There is a need for the development of a transformational leadership approach through education and training. Such initiatives aim to ensure the leaderships' understanding of disabilities and a commitment to disability inclusion. Once that is achieved, leaders have to focus on organisational development by creating a workplace culture that is inclusive of persons with disabilities. In so doing, leaders have to create a robust and influential change management framework to address the shortcomings identified in this study, including the negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities. It is essential that a single clearly defined leadership approach on disability inclusion is communicated to all leaders. This can ensure a common understanding and approach to disability affairs and demonstrate the leaderships' commitment to disability inclusion and the promotion of the human rights of persons with disabilities in the workplace.

Once the environment is ready to include persons with disabilities, leaders must formulate a disability policy and strategy to drive the inclusion of persons with disabilities. By that time, it may be easier to implement the strategy and policy formulation as all leaders will

then ideally be leading through a transformational leadership approach. Furthermore, transformational leadership may be instrumental in ensuring that there is sufficient budget and resources to drive disability initiatives in the workplace. The following figure is a recommended transformational leadership model that demonstrates how transformational leadership influences the organisation towards implementing disability laws and inclusion of persons with disability.

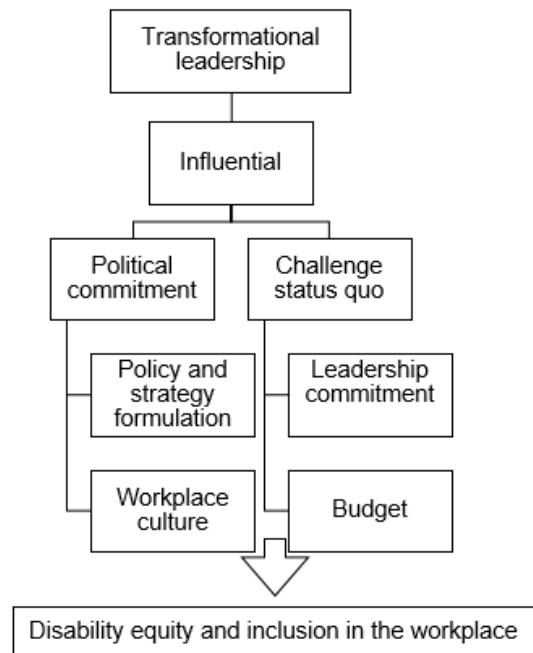


Figure 2: Transformational leadership model designed to include persons with disabilities in the workplace.

Figure 2 above places transformational leadership at the centre of all issues relating to disability inclusion in the workplace. The rationale behind placing transformational leadership at the centre is that transformational leaders possess critical attributes necessary to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities. As explored in the literature, transformational leaders are influential, visionary and committed leaders who challenge the status quo. Achua and Lussier (2013: 311) explain that transformational leaders have the ability to motivate employees to commit to a new vision and potential through effective communication skills. According to Achua and Lussier (2013: 313), they are the champions of workplace transformation, particularly if the change improves the status quo. Achua and Lussier (2013: 323) clarify that transformational leaders are tactical in dealing with workplace situations. Transformational leadership develops an influential change management strategy designed to include persons with disabilities at all occupational levels and ensures that the environment and culture are conducive for them. In this study it is established that transformational leaders promote human rights. Transformational leadership may also ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities are promoted and protected in the workplace.

As change agents, transformational leaders ensure that a strategy is developed and a disability policy adopted to include persons with disabilities and secure their effective implementation through enforcement, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Transformational leadership utilises a strategic approach to prioritise disability in the workplace by ensuring that there is a budget adequate to fund reasonable accommodation measures for persons with disabilities. By so doing, transformational leadership guarantees the effective implementation of disability laws, thereby achieving equality for persons with

disabilities. There is a relationship between each factor identified in the recommended model. For instance, without influential transformational leadership, there is no commitment from the executive leadership to include persons with disabilities.

Importantly, Vohra *et al.* (2015: 328) identify leadership as a key factor for ensuring inclusivity in the workplace. Vohra *et al.* (2015: 328) characterise an inclusive leader as “one who visibly champions diversity and initiatives linked to it, seeks out and values employees’ contributions, demonstrates a collaborative leadership style, has the ability to manage conflict, embodies merit-based decision-making, possesses cultural competency, and creates a sense of collective identity”. Clearly, without the executive leadership commitment, persons with disabilities are excluded from the workplace as there is no leadership dedicated to develop practical measures to ensure reasonable accommodation of persons with disabilities. Thus, disability laws are not effectively implemented. Ultimately, the identified attributes of transformational leadership are required to change the current status quo in relation to persons with disabilities in the workplace. Transformational leadership will foster commitment by leaders, thereby overcoming one of the principal obstacles to inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace. It is for these reasons that the model recommends the adoption of transformational leadership.

Conclusion

This study established that persons with disabilities are not practically included in the Municipality due to the lack of effective implementation of disability provisions. Although participants in this study do have some understanding of what a transformational leader is and the ‘transformational approach’, in practice these leaders do not utilise a transformational approach, due to several identified factors. Consequently, it is apparent that the Municipality fails in its constitutional and international mandate of substantive equality, particularly for persons with disabilities. The lack of disability inclusion initiatives and a questionable understanding of disabilities are further confirmed by the employees with disabilities who participated in this study. The study confirms that transformational leaders can have a tremendous impact on the workplace culture, strategy and policy implementation and that such a leadership approach is very influential on matters affecting the workplace. A transformational leadership model should be developed to assist leaders to practically achieve disability inclusion in the workplace.

Placing transformational leadership at the centre of all disability initiatives will guarantee leadership commitment to disability inclusion, resulting in the effective implementation of disability laws and achieving disability equity in the workplace. Consequently, workplaces should utilise transformational leadership as a tool to effectively implement legislation governing disability and to include persons with disabilities in the workplace. Among the findings of the study is that workplace leaders continue to focus on impairment and not the ability or potential of persons with disabilities. Future research may, therefore, focus more on transformational leadership and the capability approach to disability. Since this study was conducted using a qualitative research methodology, a follow-up mixed-method approach may be used to determine senior leaders’ and operational (junior) managers’ understandings of persons with disabilities in the workplace. Such a study may also include employees with disabilities in order to determine their perspective on the capability approach and transformational leadership. This study has developed a new research interpretation (transformational leadership within the law context) which reveals the need for further development in future studies.

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